

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SANAA 02456 021137Z

20

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 RSC-01 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 EUR-12 SSO-00

INRE-00 NSCE-00 /058 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SANAA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4656

USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 2456

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PROP, ALIB, SCUL, YE, US, PFOR

SUBJECT: CLOSING OF FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS IN YEMEN

REF: STATE 263624; SANAA 2406; SANAA 2421

1. SUMMARY: FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS ARE TO CLOSE IN FEBRUARY. WE HAVE NOT BEEN MENTIONED OR APPROACHED AND MAY NOT BE. AGREE WE SHOULD NOT RAISE SUBJECT. DO NOT BELIEVE PROBLEM INSUPERABLE OR SERIOUSLY DAMAGING IN PRACTICE TO USIS OPERATIONS. SEE NO VIABLE POSSIBILITY THAT YALI COULD BE GIVEN EXCEPTION FOR MOMENT AS FUNCTIONING CULTURAL CENTER (AS OFFSET LANGUAGE CENTER) GIVEN FACT ALL CULTURAL CENTERS, INCLUDING ARAB ONES, ORDERED TO CLOSE. FROM SECURITY POINT OF VIEW, CLOSING OF FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS IS DESIRABLE TO ALLOW YARG CONTROL SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY AND IS IN OUR INTEREST.

2. SAUDI AND BRITISH CHARGES AND RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR (AND PRESUMABLY OTHERS WE HAVE NOT CONFIRMED) WERE CALLED IN BY PRIMIN EVENING DECEMBER 1 AND TOLD CLOSE CULTURAL CENTERS IN THREE MONTHS. LOCAL PRESS HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS ARE TO CLOSE BY FEB 1975 AND ARE TO BE REPLACED BY YARG CULTURAL CENTERS FUNDED BY "SISTERLY STATES" (WE ASSUME SAG AND POSSIBLY UAEG). BRITISH CHARGE HAS AGREED REPORT FULL DETAILS OF HIS MEETING TOMORROW, BUT HAS INFORMED

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SANAA 02456 021137Z

ME THAT YEMEN-AMERICAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE WAS THE ONLY

FACILITY PRIMIN DID NOT MENTION BY NAME AS SLATED FOR CLOSURE.

3. WE AGREE COMPLETELY WITH PARA 3 DEPTTEL THAT BEST LINE OF ACTION IS TO BIDE OUR TIME, AND LET YARG INITIATE DISCUSSION OF YEMEN-AMERICAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE. FROM INFORMAL COMMENTS WE BELIEVE THERE GOOD POSSIBILITY I MAY NOT BE CALLED IN ON MATTER, SINCE SIGNIFICANT YARG FACTION SEEMS TO BE TAKING VIEW THAT YALI IS ONLY A LANGUAGE TEACHING FACILITY.

4. BASED ON CONSIDERATIONS PARAS ONE AND TWO DEPTTEL, BELIEVE WE, IF AND ONLY IF ASKED, SHOULD MAINTAIN THAT WE DO NOT NOW HAVE A CULTURAL CENTER, BUT TELL YARG THAT WE HAVE INTENDED TO INTRODUCE LOW-KEY CULTURAL PROGRAMMING INTO YALI. OUR MAIN ARGUMENT IS, NEVERTHELESS, ESSENTIALLY OF MAINTAINING OUR YARG-REQUESTED TEFL FUNCTION THERE. IF OTHER CENTERS, INCLUDING SAUDI AND IRAQI, CLOSING, LIKELY RESPONSE OF YARG, ASSUMING THAT IT ACCEPTS OUR ARGUMENT, WOULD BE TO TELL US CONTINUE TEFL PROGRAM, BUT HOLD OFF ON CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.

5. OUR MAIN TACTICAL ASSUMPTION IS THAT LITTLE IS PERMANENT IN YEMEN, COUNTRY IN WHICH CABINETS CHANGE ONCE OR TWICE YEARLY. I WOULD ANTICIPATE GOOD CHANCE THAT ALL CENTERS MAY QUIETLY RESUME ONCE CABINET CHANGES. IT WILL OF COURSE BE IMMEASURABLY EASIER FOR CENTERS WHICH HAVE NOT CEASED OPERATIONS ENTIRELY TO RESUME THEM.

6. THERE IS NATURALLY RISK IN THIS APPROACH THAT WE WILL BOX OURSELVES IN. BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE WE COULD OBTAIN EXEMPTION (AS CULTURAL CENTER RATHER THAN LANGUAGE CENTER) BY EMPHASIZING BENIGN NATURE OUR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES. INDEED WE WOULD RISK TOTAL CLOSURE OF YALI, IF WE PORTRAYED IT AS A CULTURAL CENTER. REASON CLOSURE MOVE HAS BEEN BLANKET IS THAT YARG LACKS POLITICAL STRENGTH AND WILL TO CLOSE CENTERS SELECTIVELY. IT IS MOST UNLIKELY THAT IT WOULD MAKE EXCEPTION FOR YALI, IF WE INSIST THAT IT IS A FULL FLEDGED CULTURAL CENTER, WHEN PRIMIN'S FAVORED IRAQIS AND SYRIANS ARE BEING FORCED TO CLOSE THEIR FACILITIES, AND WHEN SAUDIS ARE CLOSING VOLUNTARILY AND CAMPAIGNING FOR THE CLOSURE OF ALL CULTURAL CENTERS. IN PARTICULAR, YARG COULD NOT CLOSE DOWN ARAB CULTURAL CENTERS AND LEAVE NON-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SANAA 02456 021137Z

ARAB ONES OPERATING.

7. WITH REFERENCE USIA'S VALID CONCERNS REGARDING PRESERVATION ITS CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE VIABILITY ITS PROGRAMS HERE, IT IS CRITICAL THAT WE DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN USIS PROGRAMMING ON THE WHOLE, AND PROGRAMMING AT YALI. UNTIL NOW, USIS BY CHOICE HAS SPONSORED NO CULTURAL OR INFORMATIONAL PROGRAMS AT YALI, AND HAS NOT FELT ITS EFFECTIVENESS IMPINGED THEREBY.

USIS SPEAKERS HAVE THUS FAR ALL BEEN PROGRAMMED AT GRADUATES CLUB AND UNIVERSITY, AND WE DO NOT NOW FORESEE A SITUATION IN WHICH IT WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE TO PROGRAM THEM AT YALI THAN AT INDIGENOUS YEMENI ORGANIZATIONS. CLASSIC FEATURE FILMS, WHICH GENERALLY ARE MOST EFFECTIVE WITH SMALL AND SOPHISTICATED AUDIENCES, HAVE BEEN PROGRAMMED TO DATE ALMOST EXCLUEIVELY IN OFFICER'S HOMES, AND WE HAVE FOUND THIS MRRANGE-MENT IDEAL. WE DO WISH TO BEGIN FILM UTR SHOWINGS AT YALI, BUT WOULD NOT FEEL MANACLED IF WE HAD TO DELAY PRESENTING THEM THERE OR EVEN IF WE WERE CONTINUALLY BANNED FROM DOING SO. AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TEFL PROGRAM, WE FORESEE NO RESTRICTION ON PRESENTING ENGLISH TEACHING SEMINARS AT YWRI. IN ITS FY 75 COUNTRYMBLAN, USIS EXPLAINED THAT A LIBRARY AT YALI IS NOT A VAIBLE OPTION FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE (IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT YALI IS NOT YET SET UP FOR A BROAD RANGE OF PROGRAMS, AND IT WILL BE MANY MONTHS BEFORE IT CAN BE. BY THAT TIME THE PRESENT CIRSIS MAY WELL HAVE BLOWN OVER.) THUS FAR, USIS HAS BEEN OPERATING IN A FASHION ANALOGOUS TO USIS RIYADH. THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO DOUBT, EVEN IF YALI DOES NOT DEVELOP INTO A FULL SCALE CULTURAL CENTER, THAT USIS COULD CONTINUE FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY HERE. SHOULD YARG INITIATE BANS ON OTHER TYPES OF INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES (COLONEL HAMDI IS REPORTEDLY MOST UPSET OVER DISTRIBUTION OF LEFTIST MAGAZINES BY SOVIET CLUTURAL CENTER AND USIS HAS DECIDED DELAY DISTRIBUTION OF LATEST AL-MAJAL FOR A FEW DAYS UNTIL THIS SITUATION CLARIFIES ITSELF.), USIS EFFECTIVENESS MIGHT BE LIMITED, BUT THE PRESENT MOVE AGAINST CULTURAL CENTERS IN AN INCONVENIENCE, NOT A DISASTER.

8. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NATUARLLY MOST CONCERNED WITH OUR OWN QUITE MODEST PROGRAMS, WE MUST FACE POLITICAL FACT THAT LARGE IRAQI, LIBYAN, RUSSIAN, AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, SYRIAN CULTURAL CENTERS ARE ACTIVE AND DANGEROUS CENTERS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 SANAA 02456 021137Z

OF LEFTIST SUBVERSION IN YAR. CLOSURE OF THESE CENTERS WOULD BE IN INTEREST OF YARG AND THEREFORE USG AND SAG. EVEN THOUGH IT RATHER UNLIKELY CLOSURE WOULD BE PERMANENT, GIVEN FREQUENT CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT. SINCE MOST OF OUR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES WOULD BE PROGRAMMED OUTSIDE CENTER (NEW YARG CENTERS COULD CONCEIVABLY BE EXCELLENT LOCATION ONCE OPERATIONAL), BELIEVE IT WOULD BE WORTH OCCASIONAL INCONVENIENCE AND LOSS OF VISIBILITY INHERENT IN NOT USING BUILDING FOR NON-ELC ACTIVITIES. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN, I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD WARRANT USIA'S IMMEDIATE RECONSIDERATION OF PROGRAM. THERE IS IMPORTANT DISTINCTION BETWEEN USIS PRESENCE IN YAR, WHIDH I BELIEVE JUSTIFIED BY YEMEN BEING LARGEST AND POTENTIALLY ONE OF LEAST STABLE STATES IN ARABIAN PENINSULA, AND USE OF YALI FOR SPECIFIC CULTURAL FUNCTIONS.

9. FOR USIA: CAO NUGENT CONCURS FULLY IN FOREGOING, SPECIFICALLY IN
PARA 8.
NEWTON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCE, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, EXTREMISTS, CULTURAL CENTERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 DEC 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: izenbei0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SANAA02456
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740348-0599
From: SANAA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741267/aaaacfrd.tel
Line Count: 172
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: STATE 263624; SANAA 2406; SANAA 2421
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: izenbei0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 AUG 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <14 MAR 2003 by izenbei0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CLOSING OF FOREIGN CULTURAL CENTERS IN YEMEN
TAGS: PROP, ALIB, SCUL, PFOR, YE, US
To: STATE USIA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005